



# WHAT'S AT STAKE

A SCAN OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ACTION  
ON GENDER EQUALITY IN CANADA 2015-2025

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

With winds of change swirling as 2024 came to an end, and a historical period that looked to be winding down, a moment opened to review progress on gender equality in Canada over the previous decade. In 2018, the Canadian Women's Foundation had developed *Women's Equality in Canada: An Environmental Scan*, providing an overview of work on gender equality in Canada focused largely on the period 2005-2015. The differences between the two periods gave rise to questions to investigate, in particular, what advances were achieved over nearly 10 years with a federal government in power that had a stated commitment to gender equality? This scan set out to review what was accomplished, where gender equality sits now, and what hangs in the balance on a selected range of key gender equality issues and intersecting rights. Completed to some extent without the benefit of the passage of time on settled events and amid both a federal election and a daily rollercoaster ride of unpredictable tariff announcements with potential for immense economic impacts, the scan is at times more of a snapshot of moving events than a historical long view.

For each section this scan attempts to document significant federal government actions advancing gender equality, analyze impact and implementation – where we are now – and what's needed to sustain progress. As always, we are grateful for the collaboration of partners across women's and gender justice movements and for their ongoing work.

To set a context for this review, as the federal election began in August 2015 progress on gender equality in Canada had slowed or reversed over the preceding decade. Arriving in office in January 2006, the incoming Prime Minister held a press conference to proudly rip up national child care agreements signed by his predecessors. A plan for national child care was replaced by a \$100 monthly payment.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, outside of Quebec, affordable child care was out of sight.

For years, the federal government had refused requests to call a national inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, despite growing documentation of disappearances and murders. There was no national action plan on gender-based violence (GBV) and no contemplation on the government side of creating one, though a conversation was underway among GBV service providers and advocates. Gun control measures, which had been sparked by the 1989 murders at L'École Polytechnique, had been loosened or removed in a series of moves over the course of the government's tenure.

Institutional mechanisms for advancing gender equality formerly in place at the federal level had been removed, and organizational supports reduced. The terms “equality” and “advocacy” had been deleted from the mandate of Status of Women Canada, and most of its regional offices had been closed.<sup>2</sup> The budget was cut by 37% and many women's organizations lost all of their funding. National Indigenous organizations, including women's ones, also lost significant funding, eliminating some completely.<sup>3</sup>

In short, on Parliament Hill, advancing gender equality was not a priority, and by 2015, had not been for years.



## 2. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY IN CANADA 2015-2025

A quick note on what's here and what's not. In selecting issues to review, the Foundation focused on where our work touches, with the consequence that the scan has a higher focus on economic security, gender-based violence, child care, and housing, and areas such as international work on global gender equality and advances in gender and health policy, are not included.

### A. KEY GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES

#### ECONOMIC SECURITY

Federal government actions intended to positively impact income, labour market participation, workplace and pay regulations, and employment practices and supports for women and gender-diverse people are the focus of this section. Discussions of safe, affordable housing and access to child care, key economic issues for women and gender-diverse people, follow.

#### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality initiatives undertaken by the federal government to enhance economic security starting in 2016 include significant expansion of the [Canada Child Benefit](#), adoption of the [Pay Equity Act](#) (2018), introduction of gender responsiveness to the federal budget process, and measures supporting access to the labour force and women entrepreneurs.

In 2016, the federal government merged the Canada Child Tax Benefit, National Child Benefit Supplement and the Universal Canada Child Benefit into a single, more substantial benefit: the [Canada Child Benefit](#) (CCB). The CCB is an income-tested tax-free monthly benefit geared to support low- to middle-income families with children.<sup>4</sup> In 2018, the CCB maximum was indexed to align with the cost of living.<sup>5</sup> In 2024-25, the maximum amount per child under six is \$7787 annually, and for a child 6-17, \$6750.<sup>6</sup> Having previously adjusted Employment Insurance parental benefits to allow extension to 18 months, the federal government introduced the [Parental Sharing Benefit](#) which added five weeks of “use it or lose it” benefits for the non-birthing parent.<sup>7</sup>

The 2018 Pay Equity Act establishes a proactive pay equity regime for federally regulated workplaces with 10+ employees through proactive means to redress systemic gender-based discrimination in compensation practices and systems.<sup>8</sup> The Pay Equity Act created the federal Pay Equity Commissioner to administer and enforce “the Pay Equity Act by providing tools and guidance to employers, employees and their representatives; resolving disputes; and ensuring compliance with the Act.”<sup>9</sup> Housed in the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Pay Equity Commissioner monitors implementation of the Act, compliance, and enforcement with power to issue notices of violation and apply penalties.

Though gender-based analysis (GBA) was first brought into the federal government 30 years ago, in 2015 the Auditor-General reported that application of GBA across government departments and agencies

was inconsistent and partial.<sup>10</sup> In the 2016 Fall Economic Statement the federal government committed to “completing and publishing a gender-based analysis of budgetary measures” in future federal budgets.<sup>11</sup> Required in cabinet memos and Treasury Board submissions, the most public face of GBA/GBA+ is in federal budget documents which “have emerged as central to Canada’s conversation on GBA+.”<sup>12</sup> The 2017 federal budget was the first to include a Gender Statement, which have since been included in all subsequent budgets in various forms. In 2018, the federal government passed the Canadian Gender Budgeting Act which requires the government to report on the “impacts in terms of gender and diversity” of federal budgets, tax expenditures, and programs.<sup>13</sup>

Between 2018 and 2024, the federal government developed policies and programs to increase labour force participation and support women entrepreneurs. Employment and Social Development Canada launched [Opportunity for All – Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy](#) (2018), the [Women’s Employment Readiness Pilot Program](#) (2020), and the [Women in the Skilled Trades Initiative](#) (2022). The Canadian Business Corporations Act (2018), addressed systemic discriminatory practices in federally regulated spaces. Innovation, Science, and Development Canada launched the [50-30 Challenge: Your Diversity Advantage](#) in 2020 and the [Women’s Entrepreneurship Strategy](#) in 2021.

The federal government also introduced population-wide measures which significantly benefit economic security and health for women and gender-diverse people, such as [Pharmacare](#), the [Canadian Dental Care Plan](#), and the [National Food Program](#).

## ANALYSIS

### LABOUR FORCE

Despite legislative and policy advancements, systemic barriers continue to hinder the full economic participation of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+<sup>14</sup> people. The cost of unpaid care work continues to impact women’s ability to participate in the labour market. Unpaid care work represents 25 to 37% of Canada’s total GDP. Women spend almost 1.6 times what men do on unpaid work, accounting for roughly 3.6 million people working eight hours of unpaid work a day.<sup>15</sup>

Communities face challenges in accessing employment, equitable pay, long-term employment, and safe working environments. Though the gender wage gap narrowed between 2007 and 2022, more is needed to address pay equity for women and gender-diverse people.<sup>16</sup> Employment wage gaps in 2SLGBTQI+ communities are compounded by “multiple forms of oppression including homo/bi/transphobia, racism, sexism, ableism, xenophobia, and ageism.”<sup>17</sup> Compared to Canadian-born men overall, Indigenous women earned 20.1% less, Canadian-born women overall earned 9.2% less, and immigrant women landing as children earned 10.5% less.<sup>18</sup> In 2SLGBTQI+ communities, there is an earnings gap of 3% for gay men, 12% for lesbians, 21% for bisexual men, and 25% for bisexual women compared to heterosexual men.<sup>19</sup> Men still occupy two-thirds of all senior managerial positions, a gap which widens when examining the gender of parents with young children.<sup>20</sup>

With the current rate of progress, the pay gap in Canada would take “a half-century to see parity in wages.”<sup>21</sup> The impact of the pay gap starts at a young age; young girls experience a “\$3.00 per hour gender wage gap in full-time summer jobs”<sup>22</sup> and senior women experience a 22% gap in pensions.<sup>23</sup> The pay gap widens when you examine all the different institutional discriminatory processes and systems that affect Black, Indigenous and racialized women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people.

Significant investments have been made to address the barriers to the participation of women, girls, and gender-diverse people in the labour force. Though legislation now exists to address pay equity, gaps remain in federal actions to address discrimination for 2SLGBTQI+ workers and race-based discrimination compounding effects for Black and Indigenous communities. The federal government over the last decade introduced a common and global perspective, positioning “gender equality as central to future economic growth and prosperity” but this has failed to fully address the realities of diverse women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ communities in labour force participation.<sup>24</sup>

## CARE ECONOMY


The care economy in Canada is populated by diverse immigrant communities, including Black, Filipino, recent immigrants, undocumented women, and 2SLGBTQI+ people. It also includes many different jobs across various sectors, from nursing to personal support workers to child care workers and light-duty cleaners.

As in many other countries, most care economy workers are women. Though there have been actions to address employment and labour opportunities, “women are still largely concentrated in occupations involving the 5 Cs: caring, clerical, catering, cashiering and cleaning,” and this has not changed much since 1987.”<sup>25</sup> In Canada, women represent 90% of nurses and 90% of personal support workers, 85% of nurse aides and orderlies,<sup>26</sup> and 96.3% of early childhood educators.<sup>27</sup> These positions continue to be underpaid, undervalued, and economically vulnerable.

Over the last two decades, the care economy faced austerity measures and a transition towards privatized care practices, severely impacting employment opportunities, regulations, equity in service provision and access, labour standards, immigration, and health outcomes. Increased privatization and outsourcing to community organizations combined with the lack of government intervention had devastating impacts. Not only did it showcase the fractured care system, but it also highlighted the conditions in which care economy workers provide care.

Care work relies on “highly skilled, low-paid migrant workers” who face “restricted chances of securing permanent residence.”<sup>28</sup> As noted above, many care workers in Canada are migrant women who come to Canada to work in the mostly privatized care economy. In recent years, Canada has encouraged migrants to move and settle in rural or northern areas; however, there are many challenges that federal policies have not addressed. Migrant workers in rural communities face many compounding factors, including structural precarity, lack of labour protections, the unequal power dynamics of employer-tied housing, social isolation and patriarchal gender roles.

Programs like the Home Childcare Provider or Home Support Worker, launched in 2019, aimed to “provide a more structured pathway to permanent residence”<sup>29</sup> but fell short of promises and led to increased precarity and labour exploitation. For instance, though the ‘live-in requirement’ for care workers was removed, in reality, due to the cost of housing and daily life, care workers continued to live with their employers.<sup>30</sup> In 2019, the federal government promised to approve 5,500 workers per year for permanent residency, instead over five years only 5,700 were approved.<sup>31</sup> To address the care deficit the federal government has relied heavily on migrant and gendered labour but continues to shift towards “promoting temporary migration rather than permanent migration”.<sup>32</sup>



***“At the end of the day, the women and...gender diverse people who work in this program and who are the backbone of the care economy in Canada have not been tangibly supported.”***

*- Jade Guthrie, Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW).*

## **SUSTAINING PROGRESS**

The federal budget development process needs to continue to work toward integration of gender-based analysis (GBA+) from the outset. Mainstreaming GBA+ through establishing centres in government departments has been a positive step and going forward can cost-effectively reap huge equality benefits while expanding labour force access for women and gender-diverse people to sustain the economy. Federal organizations are also expected to include a gender and diversity lens in their evaluations, public engagements and consultations, as well as departmental plans and departmental results reports.

The Employment Equity Act Review Task Force set out strong recommendations that are key to addressing systemic issues that impact women and gender-diverse people, particularly those facing forms of systemic racial discrimination in the workplace, as the statistics attest. These recommendations should come off the shelf and be brought forward for implementation. Better outcomes for women's economic security need to go beyond market-based solutions and integrate an intersectional gender justice lens.

In the 2024 federal budget the federal government promised a Care Sector Roundtable and to explore the development of a National Caregiving Strategy. The Roundtable was announced in March 2025, shortly before election call. Canada is still in a care crisis, which calls for a holistic approach, that includes addressing systemic discrimination, infrastructural and institutional needs. As care work continues to be undervalued across communities and sectors, the leadership of a visionary Care Sector Roundtable, backed by strong government implementation is essential.

Migrant women continue to be made invisible through immigration policies. Without more action to address the lack of actual change in caregiving immigration programs, migrant populations will continue to experience high levels of discrimination.

## **CHILD CARE**

### **CANADA-WIDE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE**

#### **ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY**

Federal government development of child care began modestly with the 2016 federal budget recognizing “the deep connection between child care and the economic security of families” and proposing “to invest \$500 million in 2017-18” to establish a National Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) including \$100 million for “Indigenous child care and early learning on reserve.”<sup>33</sup> The following year, Budget 2017 added “\$7

billion over 10 years, starting in 2018-19” for more “high quality, affordable child care spaces across the country, including dedicated funds for early learning and child care programs for Indigenous children.”<sup>34</sup> The national [Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) signed in 2017 was followed by bilateral agreements with all provinces and territories.<sup>35</sup>

Emergency measures imposed in 2020 to address the COVID-19 pandemic led to temporary closure of most child care centres and quickly revealed the fragile economics of child care services supported by parent fees. Amid large-scale reduction in women’s employment, lack of access to child care threatened decades of labour force gains and advances in gender equality. A social consensus emerged around the need to build national early learning and child care (ELCC) and the 2021 federal budget - the first led by a woman Finance Minister - committed \$27.2 billion over five years to a “publicly-funded early learning and child care system for all”.<sup>36</sup>

Five-year bilateral agreements for a \$10/a day national ELCC program were signed with all 13 provinces and territories taking the program to fiscal year 2026-27,<sup>37</sup> and in March 2025, the federal government announced that 11 of the 13 had signed five-year extensions to 2031.<sup>38</sup>

The [Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) (2024) entrenched in law this “vision for a Canada-wide, community-based early learning and child care system and its commitment to ongoing collaboration with the provinces and Indigenous peoples to support them in their efforts to establish and maintain such a system.”<sup>39</sup>

## ANALYSIS

The journey to developing a national childcare program has been long - more than 50 years elapsed since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women listed child care among its recommendations, and almost 40 years since the first federal action on child care. Activists and advocates have been championing a national early childhood child care plan throughout that time.<sup>40</sup>

A 2020 report noted that “a crisis in early childhood education and child care is blocking Canada’s progress in advancing the status of women.”<sup>41</sup> The impact of not having child care is immense. At that time “41% of parents postponed their return to work” when they could not secure child care.<sup>42</sup>

While non-profit and government care spaces provide better care and job quality, including higher salaries, benefits, and lower turnover,<sup>43</sup> a market-based approach to care, including child care, has been a consistent marker within the sector. For-profit centers’ ease of access to capital led to an increase in the proportion of for-profit care centres between 2008 and 2021.<sup>44</sup> 2021 to 2023 saw “more than 40% net growth of full day care centers in the for-profit sector in eight provinces and territories.”<sup>45</sup>

Like other jobs in the care economy, early childhood educators (ECEs) have been underpaid and undervalued, and the sector is heavily reliant on immigrant and newcomer labour. One quarter of all ECEs are immigrants or non-permanent residents; 96% are women, and 25% are self-employed. In 2022, the median hourly wage for licensed ECEs was \$20, one-third did not receive health benefits, 41% didn’t have personal leave, and only 18% had access to retirement or pension plans through their workplace.<sup>46</sup> The demand for ECEs continues to rise, and between 2017 and 2021, the job vacancies almost doubled.

At the same time, the \$10-a-day ELCC program is having positive impacts. Costs to families have been reduced. As of February 2025, eight provinces and territories were delivering child care for an average of \$10 or less-a-day. All other jurisdictions had reduced fees to parents by at least half.<sup>47</sup> By 2024 employment in ELCC had grown by 40,000 positions over 2019 levels, and four times faster than employment in Canada overall, and at a 28% increase over the last five years, growth in average weekly earnings of child care workers



has significantly outpaced growth in average weekly earnings overall. Supported by the expansion of child care, women's labour force participation has increased by 1.4 percentage points over 2019, an addition of 110,000 women earning income.<sup>48</sup>

An estimated additional \$32 billion in GDP was generated in 2024 “from the combination of increased direct ELCC production, increased indirect (upstream and downstream) spin-off jobs, and increased women's labour supply (compared to 2019).”<sup>49</sup> GDP growth from expansion of ELCC services may be what prevented Canada from entering an anticipated ‘technical recession’ in the third and fourth quarters of 2023.<sup>50</sup>

This is all welcome news to families who can now access child care services, but the program rollout has not come without challenges. More investment is needed to improve the experiences and conditions of ECEs across all provinces and territories, including incentivizing better pay, access to benefits, and decent working conditions.

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

With families of approximately one million children currently accessing more affordable child care in Canada, and some of those saving up to \$16,200 per child, per year, maintaining progress on country-wide early learning and child care is crucial to economic security.<sup>51</sup>

The committed investments under bilateral agreements signed covering 2026-2031, which remain to be distributed, amount to \$36.8 billion, and the promise of affordable child care as permanent infrastructure hangs in the balance of delivering on those longer-term investments.

As the COVID-19 pandemic harshly revealed, women's access to the labour force and economic security depend on access to child care, and a strong Canadian economy depends on women in the workforce. In these uncertain economic times, continuing to build early learning and child care is strategic and absolutely vital.

## INDIGENOUS EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada issued Call to Action 11, urging “the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.”<sup>52</sup> At the time, Indigenous early learning and child care (ELCC) programs were widely regarded as underfunded, underserved, and operating with outdated policies and stagnant budgets—conditions that limited their ability to support Indigenous children and families effectively.

Later that year, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau directed the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to begin consultations on a National Early Learning and Child Care Framework. This initiative aimed to deliver affordable, high-quality, flexible, and inclusive child care for all children in Canada, with specific attention to Indigenous communities as part of the government's 2015 election commitments.

In 2016, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 39/2016, establishing the First Nations National Working Group on ELCC. This led to the formation of the National Expert Working

Group on First Nations ELCC to guide national advocacy and development efforts. In parallel, the Métis Nation committed to co-developing a Canada-wide ELCC Framework through the 2017 Canada-Métis Nation Accord. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) also began its own ELCC consultations in the same year.

Together, the AFN, ITK, the Métis National Council, and the Government of Canada co-developed the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, released in 2018 as a complementary initiative to the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework. That year, the Government of Canada pledged up to \$1.7 billion over ten years to support Indigenous ELCC services, allocated as follows:

- First Nations: \$1.02 billion
- Inuit: \$111 million
- Métis: \$450 million<sup>53</sup>

In 2019, the Métis Nation Early Learning and Child Care Accord was signed to enhance Métis-specific programming, improve service access, and integrate language and cultural content. Inuit-specific programming emphasized self-determination, curriculum development, increased access, and infrastructure upgrades. First Nations investments supported community-led ELCC services aligned with their own cultural values, traditions, and governance.

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted child care nationwide, the federal government allocated \$120 million in emergency funding to Indigenous communities for remote learning and essential services. That same year, Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) launched the Family Connections Program, with \$3.6 million in funding to support children aged 0–8. The program saw over 1,000 enrollments.

In 2021, the Government of Canada committed an additional \$2.5 billion over five years to implement the Indigenous ELCC Framework. In 2022, it introduced Bill C-35, An Act Respecting Early Learning and Child Care in Canada, to provide legislative support for a Canada-wide child care system. In 2023, a new Canada-Nunavut ELCC Action Plan was announced—a three-year plan built on an Inuit-centered approach.

In 2024, \$1.39 million was invested in the Anishnawbek Cultural Values and Well-being Based Early Childhood Development Project. Additionally, British Columbia announced the creation of 108 new Aboriginal Head Start spaces and 200 new Métis child care spaces. Most provinces and territories are now on track to deliver \$10-a-day regulated child care.

## ANALYSIS

High-quality ELCC services are vital to closing equity gaps faced by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children. Community-led programs rooted in Indigenous language, culture, land-based learning, and traditional parenting - such as the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) program - have demonstrated improvements in educational and developmental outcomes.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Workforce shortages persist due to low wages, burnout, and limited access to training, particularly in rural and remote areas. Costs, admission requirements, and geographic isolation remain significant barriers for Indigenous individuals seeking early childhood educator credentials. Addressing these issues would not only strengthen child care delivery but also contribute to the economy by raising maternal labour force participation by an estimated 7.5%.<sup>55</sup>

Access to ELCC services remains uneven, especially in northern and remote Indigenous communities.

Approximately 20.6% of Indigenous parents cite a lack of available child care or long waitlists as the reason they do not use ELCC services compared to just 7.7% of non-Indigenous parents.<sup>56</sup> Many facilities continue to operate in aging infrastructure due to insufficient investment in on-reserve childcare buildings. In some cases, unmet infrastructure needs have led to temporary or permanent closures.

Cultural responsiveness is another ongoing issue. Many ELCC programs still operate using Western educational models, which may not reflect or serve the holistic needs of Indigenous children. Recruiting and retaining educators who can provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care remains difficult. Indigenous language immersion programs are particularly underfunded, despite their importance for language revitalization. With 25 Indigenous languages in Canada spoken by fewer than 500 fluent speakers, early childhood “language nests” are urgently needed to prevent further language loss.<sup>57</sup>

The AHSUNC program illustrates some of these systemic challenges. With core funding frozen since 2002, AHSUNC sites have limited ability to expand enrolment or support children with special needs. Additionally, much of the Indigenous ELCC funding fails to meet the needs of off-reserve, off-territory, and urban Indigenous populations - despite these groups being among the fastest-growing demographics in Canada.<sup>58</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic further impacted Indigenous children’s social and emotional development. The government’s one-time \$120 million emergency investment in 2020–2021 enabled some continuity through creative adaptations, including online learning activities, home-based kits, outdoor visits, and food hampers.<sup>59</sup>

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

A strong Indigenous ELCC system must balance equity, cultural preservation, and self-determination. While recent years have brought notable progress, full Indigenous ELCC sovereignty - where every Indigenous child can access self-governed, culturally grounded care - remains an ongoing pursuit.

Sustained investment in Indigenous ELCC is essential to fulfill the promises of reconciliation, as outlined in Call to Action 12 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These investments not only address past inequities but also lay the groundwork for Indigenous children to thrive and for communities to reclaim and strengthen cultural practices vital to their self-determination and future prosperity.<sup>60</sup>

To close the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ELCC outcomes, the Government of Canada must:

- Invest in Indigenous-led early childhood educator training programs and ensure fair wages
- Expand infrastructure for on-reserve, northern, and rural child care services
- Increase support for Indigenous language and land-based ELCC programming
- Ensure adequate funding for both on- and off-reserve child care spaces.

All Indigenous children, regardless of where they live, deserve access to high-quality early learning and care that nurtures their well-being, strengthens their cultural identity, and supports their development. This is not merely a policy goal, it is a matter of human rights and a foundation for community well-being.

# ACCESS TO HOUSING

## ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Early in their first mandate, the federal government signalled an interest in connections between gender, safety, and housing with inclusion of \$89.9 million for shelters and transition houses serving survivors of family violence in the Investment in Affordable Housing initiative.<sup>61</sup> The National Housing Strategy, which followed in 2017, “dedicated 25% of its investments to addressing the housing needs of women and girls.”<sup>62</sup> The strategy also committed to prioritizing “the most vulnerable” and named those fleeing domestic violence and 2SLGBTQI+ people among the target communities.<sup>63</sup>

The [National Housing Strategy Act](#) (NHSA), passed in 2019, recognized and guaranteed the human right to access housing by the federal government.<sup>64</sup> A first of its kind in Canada, the NHSA declared that housing was “essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person...[and to] a strong national economy in which the people of Canada can prosper and thrive.”<sup>65</sup> This historic legislation included proactive measures to address accountability and established monitoring processes such as the Housing Advocate, the National Housing Council and review panels mandated to address systemic housing issues.

In 2021-22, the Rapid Housing Initiative, “arguably the most successful funding stream in support of housing for low-income people”,<sup>66</sup> received \$1.5 billion for the Rapid Housing Initiative in 2021-22 to “address the urgent housing needs of vulnerable Canadians by providing them with adequate affordable housing in short order.” At least 25% of that initiative was also targeted to women-focused housing projects.<sup>67</sup>

## ANALYSIS

Housing insecurity remains a critical barrier to economic security for women and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals. The National Housing Strategy Act recognized housing as a fundamental right, but systemic gaps persist:

- 28% of women-led households experience core housing needs
- 36% of women-identified people experience homelessness
- 90% of emergency shelter seekers are single mothers with children
- Approximately 700 women and children are turned away from shelters daily.<sup>68</sup>

Federal policies addressing housing needs don’t adequately account for hidden homelessness, which women, children and gender-diverse people face at a disproportionate rate. They also don’t “reflect Indigenous ways of understanding and experiencing homelessness, and the distinct causes, conditions, or experiences of homelessness amongst women, girls, women-led families, and gender-diverse persons.”<sup>69</sup>

In response to a call by the National Indigenous Housing Network (NIHN) and Women’s National Housing and Homelessness Network (WNHHN) and to human rights claims submitted by women with lived experience, in 2022, the National Housing Advocate asked the National Housing Council to establish a review panel.<sup>70</sup> A panel of three individuals will review the “failure to prevent and eliminate homelessness amongst women and gender-diverse people” as outlined in the NHSA.<sup>71</sup> The Advocate’s report noted a failure of housing policies to “embed an intersectional GBA+ approach,” which has led to the “failure to meet the needs of women and gender-diverse people, and in particular those who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, disabled, 2SLGBTQIA+ persons, newcomers, and/or multiply-marginalized”.<sup>72</sup>

Current programming and federal policies to address housing needs, such as the Rental Construction Financing Initiative and National Housing Co-Investment Fund (renamed Affordable Housing Fund), have been documented as not addressing the barriers to housing for low-income and women-led households.<sup>73</sup> The NHSA plans to reduce core housing needs by 50% by 2027, a goal that cannot not be reached without significant investment, programming, and policies that address the widespread housing crisis.<sup>74</sup>

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

With continuing investment, the National Housing Strategy Act can be a turning point for the housing crisis in Canada and maintaining a human rights lens. The accountability tools integrated in the NHSA are key to understanding the needs of women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ communities in accessing and maintaining housing.

There is a nationwide housing crisis. An intersectional gender lens on housing, which prioritizes those most in need is necessary to realize the goals of the NHSA and reduce the number of women and gender-diverse people living unhoused and in core housing need. Like the Rapid Housing Initiative ongoing housing initiatives – such as the recent Housing Accelerator Fund – should continue to be required to target at least 25% to women-focused housing projects.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Three major milestones define federal government action on gender-based violence in the period 2015-25: initiation of a long-awaited National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2016),<sup>75</sup> launch of the [National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence](#) (2022) and development of a [National Action Plan: Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People](#) (2021). The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the National Action Plan: Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People are discussed in the section 2SMMIWG Inquiry and Calls to Justice.

The National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence expanded federal action beyond [It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence](#), announced in 2017. With a \$100 million funding pool, the strategy had aimed to develop a prevention center and support federal agencies addressing GBV through dedicated action and inter-departmental collaborations.<sup>76</sup>

Budget 2021 announced that a broader national action plan would be developed, along with an investment of \$601 million allocated largely to the department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) for funding to GBV organizations (\$200 million), initiatives engaging boys and men (\$105 million), Indigenous organizations (\$55 million), crisis hotlines, data collection and a national secretariat.<sup>77</sup> The National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence shares responsibility for addressing GBV between federal, territorial, and provincial jurisdictions, with implementation taking place in each province and territory through bilateral agreements supported by \$539 million over five years. It also has an expansive scope, outlined in four pillars:

- Pillar 1 – Support for victims, survivors, and their families
- Pillar 2 – Prevention



- Pillar 3 – Responsive justice system
- Pillar 4 – Implementing Indigenous-led approaches.

Beyond the national plans, addressing gender-based violence crosses multiple different avenues, including economic security, access to shelter, health and social services, safety from firearms, justice issues, immigration and online safety. Between 2015 and 2019, the federal government showed increased interest in engaging with organizations supporting women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ communities through consultations and relationship building. Much of the work involved setting up processes, consultations, and community partnerships, ultimately leading to shifts in the federal government’s engagement with organizations. Budget allocations shifted as well. In 2014-15, Status of Women Canada operated with a budget of roughly \$20 million for operating and grant contributions,<sup>78</sup> by 2023-24, WAGE, which replaced Status of Women Canada, spent over \$320 million on expenses.<sup>79</sup>

Many other policies and programs have been developed since 2015, a stark shift from preceding years of reduced federal funding and limited to no federal action to address gender-based violence. Between 2021 and 2024, seven different laws addressing gender-based violence received royal assent:

Bill C-86, [A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 27, 2018 and other measures](#) (2018), added family violence leave in the Labour Code.

Bill C-65, [An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code \(harassment and violence\)](#) (2019), aimed to prevent harassment and violence in the workplace through data collection, prevention policies, training, and resolution processes that provide multiple sources of resolution.

Bill C-75, [An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to other Acts](#) (2019), included provisions that expanded the definition of intimate partner in the Criminal Code to include “current or former spouse, common-law partner and dating partner.”

Bill C-3, [An Act to amend the Judges Act and the Criminal Code](#) (2021), requires federal judges to “agree to participate in continuing education on sexual assault law and social context”, an important piece of justice-focused policy making.

Bill S-12, [An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Sex Offender Information Registration Act and the International Transfer of Offenders Act](#) (2021), expanded the role of survivors in publication bans.

Bill C-233, [An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Judges Act \(violence against an intimate partner\)](#) (Keira’s Law), requires judges to gain continuing education “on matters related to intimate partner violence and coercive control in intimate partner and family relationships.”<sup>80</sup>

Access to a safe home is a key protection against violence. With GBV shelters and transition houses perpetually at capacity, the 2016 federal budget had announced \$89.9 million over two years for construction and renovation of shelters and transition houses for victims of family violence.<sup>81</sup> Budget 2021 subsequently re-allocated \$250 million under the National Housing Co-Investment Fund to support construction, repair, and operating costs of transitional housing and shelter spaces for women and children fleeing violence. Announced concurrent with initiation of development of the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence, this was intended to reinforce those efforts to address gender-based violence.<sup>82</sup>

The last decade saw the expansion and solidification of laws and protections for women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+

communities seeking safety against violence and proactive measures to build a safer and more equitable Canada.

## ANALYSIS

### NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence is a collaborative strategy between provinces, territories, and the federal government to address gender-based violence in Canada. Launched in 2022, it defines GBV as “physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and financial abuse, as well as technology-facilitated violence.”<sup>83</sup>

*“The achievement of the national action plan on gender-based violence was huge, and it made it possible to talk more about the needs of survivors, center their activities and needs and the legislative problems.”*

*– Anuradha Dugal, Women’s Shelters Canada.*

A Roadmap for the National Action Plan on Violence against Women and Gender-based Violence was developed by stakeholders in 2021. Led by Women’s Shelters Canada, the Roadmap report “was funded by the federal department of Women and Gender Equality to develop a strategic engagement process with anti-violence leaders across Canada.”<sup>84</sup>

However, some Roadmap recommendations have not been implemented, including the creation of “an independent and impartial gender-based violence commissioner with adequate, stable funding, and effective powers.”<sup>85</sup> The National Action Plan represents decades of advocacy by feminist organizations but still leaves gaps for many communities.

### INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC AND FEMICIDE

Women and girls in Canada are disproportionately killed by someone they know, a family member or an intimate partner. According to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA), “one woman or girl is killed every other day, on average,” and a woman is killed by her male partner every week.<sup>86</sup> Of all the police-reported homicides of women between 2011 and 2021, “two-thirds (66%) were perpetrated by an intimate partner, 28% a family member, 5% a friend or acquaintance and the remaining 1% a stranger.”<sup>87</sup>

The shadow pandemic is the name the UN Special Rapporteur gave to the rise in “all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence” across the world during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>88</sup> In Canada, Statistics Canada reported that “the largest proportion of gender-related attempted murders of women and girls occurred at residential locations, involved the presence of a weapon, and resulted in physical injury.”<sup>89</sup>

However, as many have stated, intimate partner violence (IPV) is not a private issue; it is “a product of gender inequality and patriarchal social norms, colonization, systemic racism and ableism, and the ongoing oppression of marginalized communities in Canada.”<sup>90</sup>

Femicide is a stark reality, compounded by the lack of data and understanding about femicide in Canada across community organizations, justice-oriented institutions, and health practitioners. There is no federal legislation that directly addresses femicide. Statistics Canada calls this type of violence: “gender-related homicide.”<sup>91</sup> Femicide is not considered a separate crime in Canada, and many community organizations have been asking the federal government to name it. [An Act respecting national action for the prevention of intimate partner violence](#) (S-149) was sitting at third reading in the Senate when the House prorogued. If that legislation had passed, WAGE would have been required to develop a national IPV strategy within two years.

Available data has been showcased here, but significant data gaps exist, including data on femicides of Indigenous, Black and racialized women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ communities. #CallitFemicide, a study on femicide in Canada between 2018 and 2022, found only two cases in which a trans person was murdered. However, we know from community reports and anecdotal evidence that Indigenous, Black and 2SLGBTQI+ communities, including trans people, face significantly more violence even if left unreported in formal channels.<sup>92</sup>

## GUN CONTROL

Firearms present “the single greatest risk factor for the lethality of domestic violence,” particularly in rural communities, which face 2.5 times higher chance of violence than urban areas.<sup>93</sup> The Canadian Medical Association noted that “the use of a firearm in a family or intimate assault is associated with a higher likelihood of a fatal outcome including spousal murder-suicides and murder-suicides involving children and youth victims.”<sup>94</sup> The weapon used in the École Polytechnique massacre was only banned in 2020, 31 years after it was used to kill 14 women and injure 10 women and four men.

Addressing the use and dissemination of guns has been a critical issue in addressing GBV. Advocates and community-based organizations have been asking the government to remove handguns from public access. Handguns “are not used for hunting or livestock protection” and should be more restricted.<sup>95</sup> Initially, this provision was not included in Bill C-71: An Act to amend certain Acts and Regulations in relation to firearms. It included the broader requirement for an individual’s whole life history to be examined<sup>96</sup> when applying for a firearm license but not the total “freeze on the sale, purchase or transfer of handguns by individuals within Canada.”<sup>97</sup>

The Royal Assent of Bill C-21 led to the development of a more stringent process to address public safety issues related to firearms. It went beyond Bill C-71,<sup>98</sup> addressing more of what women and gun control advocates asked to see in legislation including provisions to:

- make an individual ineligible to hold a firearms licence if they are subject to a protection order or have been convicted of an offence involving family violence
- allow the Chief Firearm Officer to suspend a suspect’s license if they might have engaged in domestic violence or stalking
- revoke licenses for individuals who have a protection order against them.<sup>99</sup>

## GBV AND 2SLGBTQI+ COMMUNITIES

There is currently no standalone policy or legislative action that addresses gender-based violence in 2SLGBTQI+ communities. Instead, 2SLGBTQI+ organizations can access funding through WAGE funds for GBV prevention or funds across other departments that address GBV. There remain significant barriers for 2SLGBTQI+ organizations supporting survivors and for survivors to gain support.

GBV in 2SLGBTQI+ communities is “both hyper-visible and invisible, known and neglected.”<sup>100</sup> GBV sector services for survivors of violence are often not inclusive and or safe for 2SLGBTQI+ communities. Few organizations understand the experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ people, and survivors experience transphobia, homophobia, and biphobia as they try to access support. Black and Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ survivors face even more barriers, compounded by experiences of racism and systemic discrimination.

Research shows that 56% of trans women have experienced verbal violence from an intimate partner, and 33% reported being forced to engage in sexual activity without their consent. Gender-based violence and hate crimes against 2SLGBTQI+ communities continue to rise; between 2016-2023, police-reported hate crimes due to sexual orientation increased by 388%.<sup>101</sup> GBV faced by 2SLGBTQI+ communities includes sexual violence termed ‘corrective rape’.<sup>102</sup> These acts are extremely violent and are multiplied by behaviours that misgender or verbally abuse survivors.

2SLGBTQI+ youth face disproportionate rates of violence, including higher levels of street harassment, lack of public safety, and violence in schools. Young survivors face challenges in reporting for many reasons, including lack of support in educational institutions, fear of being outed, fear of the authorities, and fear of losing employment or housing.<sup>103</sup> All of these fears lead youth to stay in violent or unsafe situations or leave, which exposes them to homelessness and financial challenges.

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

Despite the major advances in federal action to address GBV, rates remain high, and work must continue to expand. The federal government must continue to prioritize gender-based violence through the development of legislative, policy and funding strategies. Funding through the National Action Plan needs to be renewed beyond the initial five-year period, and include implementing the recommendations outlined in [A Report to Guide the Implementation of a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence](#) including to create “an independent and impartial gender-based violence commissioner with adequate, stable funding, and effective powers.”<sup>104</sup>

There is general recognition that intimate partner violence is at epidemic levels, as acknowledged by almost 100 municipalities across Ontario, anti-violence researchers,<sup>105</sup> the government of Nova Scotia and the federal government. Recognition needs to lead to focused action.

Gun ownership in Canada is one of the highest per capita among OECD countries.<sup>106</sup> Though there has been progress in addressing gender-based violence and gun violence federally, there are still gaps in implementation. More is needed to reduce inappropriate access to firearms and ensure that the prompt removal of firearms and licenses from those subject to emergency protection orders is occurring. Momentum must be maintained on gun control legislation, including the implementation of the sections addressing gender-based violence and of the “additional 179 unique makes and models of assault-style firearms announced on March 7, 2025.”<sup>107</sup>

Long-term sustainable funding for gender equality organizations is key and required for community

organizations to address the needs of survivors of violence. Without well-resourced community organizations, many survivors will continue to face significant barriers. Funding processes should promote collaboration and reduce competition.

More attention is also needed to collection of accurate and disaggregated data, and to address GBV in specific communities. Data is an important tool in policy action. Statistics Canada continues to develop new data sets and analysis to better understand the experience of survivors. However, it is crucial that an intersectional lens is integrated into the collection of data, and that data is disaggregated. This work is crucial to understand intimate partner violence, and femicide.

With approximately 700 women and children being turned away from shelters on a daily basis, affordable housing, transitional housing and access to shelter need continued attention as part of addressing GBV.<sup>108</sup>

Increased protections and supports are needed for 2SLGBTQI+ youth and trans people of all ages given current hostile targeting campaigns violating human rights and safety.

## 2SMMIWG INQUIRY AND CALLS TO JUSTICE

### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Reversing previous federal government policy, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ People (2SMMIWG) was launched in 2015 to address the disproportionately high levels of violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals across Canada. After four years of extensive hearings and research, the Inquiry released its Final Report, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, with 231 Calls for Justice urging transformative legal and social reforms. In addition, Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak released *Métis Perspectives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTQ2S+ People*, outlining 62 Calls for Miskotahâ (change) specific to the Métis Nation.<sup>109</sup> These reports identified a range of systemic, institutional, social, and historical factors - including colonial policies, racism, and socio-economic marginalization - as root causes of the violence. They concluded that Canada's treatment of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people constitutes genocide.<sup>110</sup>

In 2019, a year after the Final Report's release, Indigenous leaders, families, and advocacy organizations publicly expressed disappointment over the lack of follow-up government action. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic only intensified the crisis: preliminary surveys indicated that one in five Indigenous women experienced physical or psychological violence within the first three months of lockdowns.<sup>111</sup> In response, the federal government announced a \$724.1 million Comprehensive Violence Prevention Strategy, primarily focused on funding shelters and transitional housing for Indigenous peoples.<sup>112</sup>

In late 2020, the federal government established a Core Working Group to develop the National Action Plan (NAP) in response to Call for Justice 1.1. Released in 2021, the NAP aimed to address the root causes of violence through sweeping changes to laws, policies, and systems.<sup>113</sup> Alongside it, the federal government introduced *The Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQI+ People*, outlining commitments to improve safety and socio-economic outcomes.<sup>114</sup> Inuit-specific implementation guidance came through the National Inuit Action Plan, led by Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), addressing the 46 Inuit-specific Calls for Justice.<sup>115</sup>

The urgency of implementation was tragically reaffirmed in 2022. Between March and June, four Indigenous women—Marcedes Myran, Rebecca Contois, Morgan Harris, and Ashlee Shingoose—were murdered by a man



with known anti-Indigenous views. Winnipeg police initially declined to search the Prairie Green landfill, where Myran's and Harris's remains were believed to be located, citing safety concerns.<sup>116</sup> In the face of sustained advocacy by their families and First Nations leaders, the Manitoba government announced in December 2024 that a search would proceed. The remains of Myran and Harris have since been located and identified.<sup>117</sup>

## ANALYSIS

Violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people continues at crisis levels:

- Between 2009 and 2021, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women and girls were six times more likely to be homicide victims than non-Indigenous women<sup>118</sup>
- Indigenous women account for 10% of all women reported missing in Canada<sup>119</sup>
- Over 60% of Indigenous women (63%) report experiencing physical or sexual violence since age 15<sup>120</sup>
- Rates are higher still among those who have experienced homelessness, been in the child welfare system, or live with disabilities.<sup>121</sup>

The systems that should protect Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ People (2SMMIWG) too often fail them and rarely are their families and communities given the justice they deserve.<sup>122</sup>

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ People was intended to “End genocide, tackle root causes of violence, and improve the quality of life of Indigenous women.”<sup>123</sup> There remain substantial gaps between what was promised in the National Inquiry and what has been delivered.

Although the National Inquiry aimed to end this violence and improve quality of life, many of its promises remain unmet. In 2023, CBC News reported that only two Calls for Justice affecting First Nations had been fully implemented.<sup>124</sup> Federal tracking reports that 115 Calls have been “actioned,” 105 are “pending,” and 11 remain unaddressed.<sup>125</sup> Still, several developments have been noted by Indigenous organizations and the federal government:

- Indigenous-federal-provincial-territorial roundtables on 2SMMIWG began in 2023<sup>126</sup>
- The Addressing Anti-Indigenous Racism in Canada's Health Systems initiative has led to the hiring of 94 health system navigators and 19 patient advocates.<sup>127</sup>
- Since 2023, \$95.8 million over five years has been committed to support families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people<sup>128</sup>
- Pauktuutit and ITK have reported improvements in housing, health, and justice services<sup>129</sup>
- The 2023-2024 Federal Pathway Métis Highlight Report noted progress in healthcare access, justice, and data collection for Métis women and gender-diverse people<sup>130</sup>
- The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples noted that the Looking Out for Each Other (LOFEO) project has improved police response protocols in missing persons cases.<sup>131</sup>

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

The National Inquiry unearthed the extent of this crisis; now, governments, institutions, social service providers, industries, and all Canadians have an imperative to dismantle the systems of oppression that continue to contribute to the murders and disappearances of Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ People (2SMMIWG).<sup>132</sup>

Yet as the AFN has emphasized, little progress has been made in implementing the National Action Plan. In their Calls for Justice Report Card, the following were listed as troubling setbacks between 2019 and 2024:

- Funding for Family Information Liaison Units (FILUs) has decreased, forcing some to close<sup>133</sup>
- A March 2024 Auditor General report found Public Safety Canada mismanaging the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program (FNIPP), resulting in inconsistent funding to Indigenous communities<sup>134</sup>
- The Correctional Investigator reported that the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in federal prisons has worsened<sup>135</sup>
- More than half of Indigenous Housing Initiatives remain unfulfilled, according to a 2024 audit<sup>136</sup>
- Provincial legislation in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Alberta has introduced “parental rights” policies negatively impacting transgender and Two-Spirit youth.<sup>137</sup>

Failing to fully implement the Calls for Justice undermines the credibility of reconciliation efforts, reducing them to symbolic gestures. A serious response to the National Inquiry and Action Plan requires confronting colonial, racial, and gender-based systems that continue to devalue Indigenous lives.

Key areas for ongoing focus include:

- Independent, Indigenous-led oversight of policing and investments in community-based justice rooted in Indigenous legal traditions<sup>138</sup>
- Long-term, sustainable funding for culturally relevant, trauma-informed health care and social services<sup>139</sup>
- Safe housing, reliable transportation, and culturally grounded education and employment supports to reduce vulnerability to violence.<sup>140</sup>

As Natasha Harrison, mother of Tatyanna Harrison, poignantly stated, “We need to end the careless disregard for human life based on race, stigma and class. All humans deserve justice, and we need to do better as a society.”<sup>141</sup> Addressing the 2SMMIWG crisis is not only a moral imperative, it is a critical step toward justice, healing, and self-determination for the families and communities most affected.

*“We need to end the careless disregard for human life based on race, stigma and class. All humans deserve justice, and we need to do better as a society.”*

*– Natasha Harrison, mother of Tatyanna Harrison*

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND INDIGENOUS 2SLGBTQI+ PEOPLE

## ACTIONS ADDRESSING GENDER EQUALITY

In Canada, identifying as both Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, or Métis) and 2SLGBTQI+ means navigating multiple, intersecting forms of marginalization. For some, this also includes identifying as Two-Spirit, an identity that holds deep cultural and spiritual significance. The term “Two-Spirit”, introduced in Winnipeg in 1990 as an English translation of the Anishinaabemowin phrase *niizh manidoowag*, refers to a person who embodies both masculine and feminine spirits.<sup>142</sup> Others may use terms like “Indigiqueer” or language-specific identifiers that reflect their Nation’s understanding of gender and sexual diversity.

Research shows that Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ people face disproportionately high rates of violence. Two-Spirit individuals, in particular, are more likely to experience physical and sexual assault than both heterosexual Indigenous people and LGBTQ+ individuals in the general population.<sup>143 144</sup> In 2015, a pivotal moment of visibility occurred when Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation hosted the first on-reserve Pride celebration, a vibrant expression of inclusion, featuring drumming, dancing, and support from community leadership, including Chief Ava Hill.<sup>145</sup>

That same year, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ People was launched. The Inquiry recognized the unique and often overlooked experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and issued 32 specific Calls for Justice, highlighting critical areas such as culturally inclusive spaces, housing, data collection, and safety.<sup>146</sup> In response, federal and Indigenous governments initiated some steps. The federal government added protections for gender identity and expression to the Human Rights Act (2017),<sup>147</sup> repealed discriminatory Criminal Code provisions (2019),<sup>148</sup> and passed a law banning conversion therapy (2021).<sup>149</sup> Meanwhile, the AFN established a permanent 2SLGBTQ+ Council,<sup>150</sup> and the Métis Nation launched initiatives to support 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.<sup>151 152</sup> Amautiit also developed a glossary in Inuktitut and English to promote inclusive language.<sup>153</sup>

In its 2022–23 Federal Pathway Annual Progress Report, the federal government acknowledged a critical barrier: a lack of disaggregated data that makes it difficult to fully understand the lived experiences of Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ people. Without this clarity, it is challenging to assess the scale of the issue or allocate appropriate resources to close socioeconomic gaps and improve safety.<sup>154</sup>

More recently, the 2023–24 Highlight Report: 2SLGBTQI+ highlighted some funding initiatives aimed at addressing this gap. Indigenous Services Canada supported efforts by Mnaamodzawin Health Services, Migisi Sahgaigan (Eagle Lake) First Nation, and the Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan to promote the safety and well-being of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.<sup>155</sup> Through the Addressing Anti-Indigenous Racism in Canada’s Health Systems initiative, funding was also provided to programs such as Pauktuutit’s Sexual Health Youth Forum, 2 Spirits in Motion, and the FOXY (Fostering Open Expression Amongst Youth) initiative.<sup>156</sup>

Advancements under the Disaggregated Data Action Plan have begun to capture critical information about Indigenous identity and sexual orientation across several national surveys.<sup>157</sup> For the first time, this includes data on the percentage of Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ people who report experiences of gender-based violence, insights that will be able to inform and drive future investments in prevention and support efforts upon publication.<sup>158</sup>

## ANALYSIS

Many systemic gaps remain. Despite federal commitments, government budgets have largely overlooked the specific needs of Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ people. No targeted investments for Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ people were identified in the 2021 federal budget.<sup>159</sup>

To be Indigenous and 2SLGBTQI+ is to inhabit a deeply layered identity, one shaped by colonialism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia. These intersecting forces result in heightened exposure to violence, discrimination, and exclusion. Yet this identity is also a source of strength, spirituality, and sacredness. As Anishinaabe Two-Spirit knowledge keeper Martini Monkman reminds us: “Prior to colonization, Two-Spirit people were allowed to just be... We were considered sacred.”<sup>160</sup> Despite this truth, Two-Spirit and Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ people continue to face disproportionate levels of harm, as evident in the limited data available on their lived experiences:

- Two-Spirit people and Indigenous people who identify as LGBTQ+ face higher levels of discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, Indigenous origins and sometimes their HIV positive status or whether they have Hepatitis C<sup>161</sup>
- Structural racism, colonization, social exclusion, and poverty all contribute to elevated risks of violence<sup>162</sup>
- Two-Spirit and sexual minority Indigenous youth are at increased risk for suicidality due to stigma and lack of culturally appropriate healthcare<sup>163</sup>
- In the Trans PULSE Canada survey, 80% of Indigenous trans, Two-Spirit, and non-binary respondents reported facing barriers in cultural spaces; 76% reported avoiding multiple public spaces out of fear of harassment<sup>164</sup>
- There remains a significant gap in research on GBV against Two-Spirit individuals and Indigenous males.<sup>165</sup>

Although data remains limited, the available evidence underscores the heightened vulnerability of Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ people to gender-based violence, despite federal government acknowledgment and commitments made in the National Inquiry Final Report.

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

It is difficult to determine what sustaining progress looks like because so little is statistically known, and so few Calls for Justice have been carried out. As the AFN identified in their 2024 Calls for Justice Progress Report, what has been observed is no progress to moderate progress on the 2SLGBTQI+ specific Calls for Justice.<sup>166</sup>

No progress on:

- Increasing “2SLGBTQIA+” representation in front-line healthcare, childcare, and other social support service staff and providing culturally specific support services or safe spaces
- Ensuring the safety of “2SLGBTQIA+” people interacting with police
- Providing dedicated support services or cultural support in either federal or provincial correctional institutions.

Little progress on:

- Supporting greater inclusivity of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and groups
- Supporting 2SLGBTQI+ youth programs
- Creating safe spaces and supporting 2SLGBTQI+ organizations
- Gathering 2SLGBTQI+ cultural knowledge and traditional teachings
- Raising awareness and improving cultural training specific to Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ people
- Integrating healthcare provider education pertaining to “2SLGBTQQIA+” individuals and empowering Indigenous care workers and those seeking “2SLGBTQQIA+” healthcare services.

Moderate progress on:

- Increasing precision in Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ data collection and research methods
- Improving the use of gender-neutral or non-binary options in coroners’ reports and reporting related to crime
- Ensuring there is “2SLGBTQQIA+” education and training within child welfare agencies.

Expert Witness Albert McLeod stated, “The Canadian state enacted a policy that forcibly altered Indigenous gender norms and aimed to erase and exclude 2SLGBTQQIA identities... a policy of erasure and exclusion that continues today.”<sup>167</sup> And yet, Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ resilience endures, “the resiliency of Indigenous peoples has allowed them to survive and flourish in the face of horrendous colonial oppression, demonstrating collective strength and fortitude.”<sup>168</sup> Two-Spirit Tk’emlúps community member Jeffrey McNeil-Seymour said it plainly: “We’re the most marginalized group in Canada.”<sup>169</sup>

Meaningful change requires collective commitment from Indigenous nations, 2SLGBTQI+ organizations, governments, and allies. Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ people deserve not only safety and support, but also celebration. It’s time to collectively ensure they are not just included, but honored, empowered, and protected in every space they call home.

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Access to sexual and reproductive health for communities across Canada has drastically shifted in the last decade. The 2021 federal budget announced the Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund with a commitment of \$45 million for three years to provide sexual and reproductive health and abortion care services for Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQI+, immigrants and migrants, women and youth from rural communities, and people living with disabilities. The fund was extended in the 2023 budget, and a Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund at Health Canada was made permanent in the 2024 Fall Economic Statement with a commitment of \$50 million over six years.<sup>170</sup> Also in the Fall Statement was a proposal to allocate \$7.5 million to Statistics Canada between



2025 and 2029 for new data and surveys about sexual and reproductive health.

2024 also saw passage of Bill-C64, [An Act respecting pharmacare](#) which outlined the “principles that the Minister of Health is to consider when working towards the implementation of national universal pharmacare.”<sup>171</sup> Bill C-64 represents a significant milestone, the initiation of a transformative health program and a missing piece of Canada’s public health care system. The Act initiates free access to contraceptives and diabetes medications, which have the potential to transform individual socio-economic outcomes. As of mid-March 2025, three provinces and one territory have signed agreements under the Act with the federal government. Manitoba is scheduled to receive \$219 million over four years, BC \$670 million, PEI \$30 million, and Yukon \$9.2 million over the same period to support universal coverage for diabetes medication, contraceptives and related medical supplies.<sup>172</sup>

The federal government announced development of a national pilot program for a [Menstrual Equity Fund](#) in Federal Budget 2022 to provide free access to menstrual supplies as well as education on sexual and reproductive health and rights. WAGE led development of the pilot, selecting Food Banks Canada to deliver a program beginning September 2023 with hundreds of pilot site locations in all provinces and territories, distribution partnerships, and organizations across the country providing education and awareness activities. Supplemental funding to continue the pilot was included in the 2024 federal budget.<sup>173</sup>

## ANALYSIS

Abortion has been legal in Canada since 1988, but access to abortion, contraception and other sexual and reproductive health services in Canada is not equal. Many women and gender-diverse people face barriers including but not limited to financial, social, geographical location, sentiments of medical professionals and finding clinics that offer the services. Most abortion service providers are in urban centres, and “located less than 150 km from the U.S border”<sup>174</sup> which leaves many people without access. Only three provinces have a centralized system to support people looking for abortion providers (BC, NS and PEI), and according to Action Canada’s tracker, only Ontario and Nova Scotia have an effective referral policy.<sup>175</sup> The Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund aims to address barriers through funding programs across the country which are increasing information about and access to sexual and reproductive health services.

National Pharmacare represents a step toward equitable access to contraception, which will transform the socio-economic opportunities for women, girls and gender-diverse peoples. Having access to free contraception means that people will not have to choose between contraceptives and other needs, like food and shelter. Access to contraception is a cross-community issue, as it allows communities to thrive.

***“The universal drug care program means you do not need to choose between paying groceries or accessing contraception and drugs that you need for your life. It also means that your access to this drug isn’t determined by your postal code”***

***- Debbie Owusu-Akyeeah***

In addition to medical services, education is an important piece to ensure that communities have access to sexual and reproductive health information. This is especially important for young people. The most recent Canadian Social Survey noted that only 10% of male-identifying respondents spoke to health care providers about sexual and reproductive health needs. In addition, “fewer than 1 in 5 had ever discussed sexual history, the prevention of sexually transmitted or blood-borne infections, fertility, sexual relationships and sexuality.”<sup>176</sup> Discomfort with speaking to healthcare providers is higher in young people, and even higher in youth who identify as 2SLGBTQI+.<sup>177</sup>

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

The permanent Sexual Reproductive Health Fund at Health Canada and initiation of national Pharmacare, with coverage of contraceptives, are transformative structural advances on gender equality in sexual and reproductive health. Realizing the full potential of these initiatives requires completing current commitments to these programs and renewing and expanding into the future. To date, six provinces and two territories have yet to sign on to Pharmacare.

# CLIMATE CRISIS AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

## ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Significant federal government action on climate change began after Canada signed the Paris Agreement in 2015. A review of eight major federal climate initiatives - five policies and three pieces of legislation<sup>178</sup> - enacted since 2015, showed little, if any, attention was paid to gender before 2020.<sup>179</sup> In more recent years, gendered climate impacts and risks have been incrementally mentioned while policy development seeks to prioritize vulnerability and equity. The GBA+ Centre of Responsibility at Environment and Climate Change Canada concluded that the National Adaptation Strategy (2023) places “a priority on advancing equity through adaptation action”<sup>180</sup> with particular focus on groups “disproportionately affected by climate change - including women, Indigenous peoples, seniors, youth, persons with disabilities and those from low-income households.”<sup>181</sup>

The Climate Change Branch of Environment and Climate Change Canada has established partnerships with the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) and Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LFMO).<sup>182</sup> NWAC is in receipt of capacity funding 2020-26 to support the engagement of National Indigenous Organizations, affiliates and regional organizations in climate change policy discussions through the federal Engaging Indigenous Peoples in Climate Change Policy.<sup>183</sup> NWAC’s Environmental Conservation and Climate Change Office Canada is the leading resource dedicated to researching and addressing the impacts of biodiversity and climate change on Indigenous women, children, youth, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse persons in Canada.<sup>184</sup> LFMO is supported to build relationships and support climate change research and action including advocacy to ensure that traditional practices of Métis women and 2SLGBTQI+ people as caretakers of the earth, keepers of culture, and land protectors are carried forward. LFMO’s “Mothers of the Land, Water and Skies” project engages Métis women and 2SLGBTQI+ people on climate change impacts, experiences, concerns and recommendations.<sup>185</sup>

The federal government established Permanent Bilateral Mechanisms with the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Métis National Council:

- First Nations-Canada Joint Committee on Climate Action
- Inuit-Canada Table on Clean Growth and Climate Change implementing the National Inuit Climate Change Strategy
- Goose Moon Table advancing Métis Nation climate leadership.<sup>186</sup>

Bill C-226: An Act Respecting the Development of a National Strategy to Assess, Prevent and Address Environmental Racism and to Advance Environmental Justice to “promote efforts across Canada to advance environmental justice and to assess, prevent and address environmental racism” became law in 2024.<sup>187</sup> This is the first federal legislative action in Canada that directly addresses how climate and environmental decisions can perpetuate systemic and institutional racism. Bill-C226 requires development and tabling of a national strategy that examines the “link between race, socio-economic status and environmental risk” within two years.<sup>188</sup>

## ANALYSIS

According to the report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls, Causes, and Consequences, globally “women are 14 times more likely to die in a climate catastrophe than men.”<sup>189</sup> This is due to the compounded effects of climate change and emergencies, including housing, safety, income, access to food and sanitation, and forced displacement. As climate crises and disasters occur with increasing frequency in Canada, evidence has mounted that those already experiencing inequality, including women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people who are First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Black, racialized, migrant, and/or living with disabilities, are at greater risk of climate impacts and disproportionately impacted.

Lack of an intersectional gender lens on Canada’s package of climate change initiatives, and subsuming gender under equity potentially undermines development of much-needed, measurable actions to address intersectional gendered impacts of the climate crisis. Federal climate initiatives need to take impacts on women, trans, and non-binary people into account and include adaptation support for the women’s and gender justice sector from inception of policy.

The impact of environmental and social disasters on women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ communities falls into two distinct but related areas: environmental racism and environmental justice.”<sup>190</sup> Bill C-226 is the first legislative document addressing both, the federal government chose not to provide distinct definitions but instead offered broad concepts:

- Environmental Justice refers to “a movement seeking to ensure fair and meaningful inclusion of affected peoples and equal sharing of benefits and costs... recognize and seek to address the existing inequalities faced by Indigenous, racialized, or otherwise marginalized communities throughout the decision-making process.”<sup>191</sup>
- Environmental racism is “a form of systemic racism... [that] overly disadvantages some people due to their race. This outcome can be intentional or unintentional.”<sup>192</sup>

Recognition of these concepts by the federal government opens the door to a better understanding of how climate change, just and clean energy transitions, and emergency preparedness need to consider the impacts on women, girls and gender-diverse people.

There is a gender gap in emergency preparedness at all government levels. Recent research “has been unable to identify any provincial, territorial, or municipal level emergency response plan that includes an explicit

intersectional gender-based analysis (GBA+) or reference to GBV.”<sup>193</sup> Federal departments and staff do not understand the diverse and complex needs of communities experiencing emergencies.

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

Sustaining progress on gender and climate change will require building on the framework of initiatives introduced by the federal government since signing the Paris Agreement, including continuing to increase attention to gendered impacts and incorporation of an intersectional gender and equity lens, especially in adaptation work. The gender gap in emergency planning and preparedness needs to close, and the federal government can lead on that process. Building on established relationships with the Native Women’s Association of Canada and Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak needs to continue, as do the Permanent Bilateral Mechanisms with the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Métis National Council.

Bill-C226 provides an opportunity for a national strategy to address systemic and racial disparities in climate crisis initiatives at the federal level and building a pathway to promote environmental justice and centre Indigenous, Black, women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ communities in the disaster response and climate change work.

# REPRESENTATION, LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

## ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Taking office in 2015, the incoming federal government announced that for the first time, the federal cabinet would have gender parity, normalizing this step forward on gender equality with the assertion “Because it’s 2015”.<sup>194</sup> The gender balance of the departing cabinet was 27 men and 12 women, which was not untypical.<sup>195</sup> As previously noted, this period also saw the first woman to serve as Minister of Finance, who announced national \$10-a-day child care in her first budget.

The federal government also “took steps to boost the representation of women and other marginalized groups in senior management” of the public service,<sup>196</sup> in the judiciary and in the Senate. As of April 1, 2025, there were 1224 federally-appointed justices in Canada, and 591 or 48% were women.<sup>197</sup> Women currently make-up the majority of 105 senators, with 57 women in the Senate and 48 men.<sup>198</sup> Forty-six of the 85 senators appointed 2015-25 were women.<sup>199</sup>

The government lifted the ban imposed by the previous government on Status of Women Canada funding for advocacy and related activities.<sup>200</sup> In December 2018, a free-standing department of Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) was created, transforming the Status of Women Canada, formerly housed in the department of Canadian Heritage. The Minister for Status of Women was restyled as the Minister for Women and Gender Equality, soon commonly known as WAGE. The mandate of WAGE was expanded as was the understanding of the scope of gender equality in Canada. As noted earlier, WAGE’s budget also expanded dramatically from Status of Women Canada’s operating budget of roughly \$20 million for operating and grant contributions in 2014-15.<sup>201</sup>

## ANALYSIS

WAGE’s mandate is to advance gender equality through “implementing policies, providing grants and contributions, delivering programs, investing in research, and providing advice to achieve equality for people of all genders, including women.”<sup>202</sup> The department plays a key role promoting and advising on gender equality issues. In addition to leading development of the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence and funding women’s, 2SLGBTQI+, and gender justice organizations, during the pandemic, WAGE directed \$300 million over three years to organizations supporting women, girls and gender-diverse people experiencing GBV.<sup>203</sup>

WAGE has carriage of the mission to adopt GBA+ across whole of government, an institutional mechanism that holds promise for advancing gender equality.<sup>204</sup> Mainstreaming of GBA+ within government includes establishment of GBA+ centres in ministries and departments and integration of GBA+ in their policy cycles. In 2021, WAGE developed a suite of tools to support the application of GBA+.<sup>205</sup> The change 2021 to 2023 in the percentage of departments and agencies which “almost to always” integrated GBA+ tools in stages in the policy cycle shows concerted but modest progress:

• Problem definition	2023: 36%	2021: 21%
• Analysis and research	2023: 47%	2021: 26%
• Development of options	2023: 41%	2021: 28%
• Decision making	2023: 43%	2021: 23%
• Policy/program implementation	2023: 45%	2021: 28%
• Policy/program evaluation	2023: 53%	2021: 30% <sup>206</sup>

WAGE program funding to organizations, though welcome, remains restricted to project and capacity funding. The precarity of the women’s and gender justice sector demands operational funding to provide stability and sustainability.

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

An immediate step to sustain progress on gender equality is restoration of a Minister for Women and Gender Equality to lead government work. Cabinet must have a seat at the table dedicated gender equality. Elimination of that undermines decades of progress toward gender equality and political representation in Canada. The absence of a dedicated minister sends a troubling message about government priorities and commitment to advancing gender equality. A strong economy requires investment in feminist policies, gender equality is the backbone of a strong economy and resilient society.<sup>207</sup>

There are concerns that “grants and contributions from WAGE Canada are set to decline sharply starting in 2024-25” from \$323.2 million in 2023-24 to \$240 million by 2026-27.<sup>208</sup> Women’s and gender justice organizations, and the people they serve, would be hard hit by a major decrease in WAGE funding opportunities.

Continuing to mainstream GBA+ inside the federal government by establishing GBA+ centres in ministries and departments and providing training is critical ensuring gender equality is embedded in policies and programs.



# B. GENDER RIGHTS AND SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION

## RECONCILIATION AND DECOLONIZATION

### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) emerged from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA).<sup>209</sup> Beginning in 2010, the TRC gathered testimonies, documenting the truth of what happened in residential schools while promoting healing and reconciliation.<sup>210</sup> In 2015, the TRC released its final report, calling the residential school system a form of “cultural genocide.”<sup>211</sup> It included Ten Principles for Reconciliation and 94 Calls to Action, laying out a roadmap for reconciliation across Canadian sectors and levels of government. At the time, the TRC was heralded as a moment of reckoning for Canada’s shameful past and a potential turning point in its relationship with Indigenous peoples.

In 2016, the federal government responded to Call to Action #41 by establishing the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people (2SMMIWG), tasked with addressing the systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.<sup>212</sup> That same year, the federal government fully endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) a resolution it had previously opposed in 2007.<sup>213</sup> Then-Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Carolyn Bennett told the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: “We intend nothing less than to adopt and implement the declaration in accordance with the Canadian Constitution.”<sup>214</sup>

In 2017, the government introduced ten Principles Respecting the Government of Canada’s Relationship with Indigenous Peoples, guiding federal laws, policies, and practices.<sup>215</sup> Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) was dissolved and replaced by two departments: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC), and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC).<sup>216</sup> Parliament also passed Bill S-3, which addressed known sex-based inequities in the registration provisions of the Indian Act.<sup>217</sup>

In 2018, Parliament amended the First Nations Land Management Act in consultation with Indigenous-led institutions, giving First Nations greater decision-making power over the management of reserve lands.<sup>218</sup> The Department for Women and Gender Equality Act was passed, affirming that the rights outlined in UNDRIP apply equally regardless of sex.<sup>219</sup> That year, the Sixties Scoop settlement provided \$500 to \$750 million in compensation to Status Indian and Inuit people taken from their families and placed in non-Indigenous care.<sup>220</sup> The Anishinabek Nation Education Agreement Act (Bill C-61) was also passed, establishing a culturally relevant education system designed by and for Anishinabek First Nations.<sup>221</sup>

In 2019, the final report of the MMIWG National Inquiry was published.<sup>222</sup> Canada launched its Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, designed to align federal activity with the priorities of Indigenous peoples.<sup>223</sup> Prime Minister Justin Trudeau formally apologized to Inuit communities for the government’s mishandling of the mid-20th-century tuberculosis epidemic.<sup>224</sup> The federal government forgave \$550 million in loans to Indigenous groups for negotiating land claims and treaties, benefiting over 200 communities.<sup>225</sup> In response to a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) ruling, Parliament passed Bill C-92 - An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families affirming Indigenous peoples’ right to determine their own child and family services.<sup>226</sup> That same year, Parliament also passed the Indigenous Languages Act to support language revitalization.<sup>227</sup>

One promise that was fulfilled was the creation of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a statutory

holiday responding to Call to Action #80.<sup>228</sup> However, the Prime Minister faced criticism for vacationing in Tofino on the inaugural day.<sup>229</sup>

In 2022, British Columbia became the first province to implement UNDRIP and published an 89-point action plan to advance Indigenous rights.<sup>230</sup> Pope Francis issued apologies in the Vatican and across Canada for the Catholic Church's role in residential schools, acknowledging them as a form of genocide.<sup>231</sup> Following this, MP Leah Gazan introduced a motion to formally recognize Canada's residential schools as genocide. It passed unanimously.<sup>232</sup>

In 2023, the federal government released the UN Declaration Act Action Plan, outlining 181 measures to implement UNDRIP.<sup>233</sup> Amendments to the First Nations Fiscal Management Act (FNFMA) expanded First Nations' fiscal autonomy and capacity for infrastructure development.<sup>234</sup> The Western Arctic – Tasiuq (Offshore) Accord was signed, granting the Inuvialuit equal governance rights over petroleum resource management.<sup>235</sup>

## ANALYSIS

While 2019 saw many crucial steps ahead in reconciliation and decolonization, it was also flanked by regressions. These included the high-profile demotion of the first federal Indigenous justice minister Jody Wilson-Raybould<sup>236</sup> and treatment of the Unist'ot'en Camp protestors in British Columbia.<sup>237</sup>

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, Indigenous peoples across Canada demonstrated remarkable leadership, resilience, and strength. Despite this, they were disproportionately affected by the virus, experiencing higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and intensive care admissions than non-Indigenous populations.<sup>238</sup> The tragic death of Joyce Echaquan, an Atikamekw woman who was mistreated and verbally abused by hospital staff before dying unnecessarily of pulmonary edema, laid bare the deep-rooted racism that persists within Canada's healthcare system.<sup>239</sup> That same year, a five-year review by the Yellowhead Institute found that only eight of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action had been fully implemented, underscoring Canada's slow pace on reconciliation.<sup>240</sup> Meanwhile, frustration and grief galvanized resistance across the country, fueling a resurgence of #CancelCanadaDay protests led by Idle No More.<sup>241</sup>

Protests intensified in 2021, following the discovery of 215 unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.<sup>242</sup> Since then, over 2,300 suspected graves have been found across the country. The government failed to meet its 2015 campaign promise to end all long-term drinking water advisories in First Nations communities by 2021, a commitment that remains unmet.

Reconciliation was not upheld uniformly across the country. Access-to-information records revealed that the RCMP had spent \$50 million on its controversial Community-Industry Response Group (renamed the Critical Response Unit).<sup>243</sup> Lacking clear jurisdiction or oversight, this unit was tasked with suppressing First Nations resistance to resource projects like Coastal GasLink and the Trans Mountain pipeline. The Critical Response Unit was later found to have acted unreasonably by the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission.<sup>244</sup>

In 2024, the National Council for Reconciliation Act (Bill C-29) came into force, establishing an Indigenous-led body to monitor Canada's reconciliation efforts, fulfilling Call to Action #54.<sup>245</sup> The Prime Minister also announced a new Commissioner for Modern Treaty Implementation.<sup>246</sup> That year, the B.C. government and the Council of the Haida Nation signed an agreement officially recognizing Haida Gwaii's Aboriginal title, which was subsequently ratified by the federal government.<sup>247</sup> Haida Gwaii serves as one example of where efforts in reconciliation and decolonization could go from here.

The past decade reflects a complex landscape, marked by both progress and persistent barriers to

reconciliation and decolonization. While some commitments have been fulfilled, the transformative potential of the TRC's Calls to Action and the 2SMMIWG Calls for Justice have yet to be fully realized.

In 2023, the federal government reported that over 85% of its Calls to Action were completed or well underway.<sup>248</sup> This figure was contested by organizations like Indigenous Watchdog and the Yellowhead Institute.<sup>249 250</sup> In its 2023 review, the Yellowhead Institute remarked, "Another year of no Calls to Action being completed...has made us question what exactly the point of this work is."<sup>251</sup> Their frustration at Canada's lack of progress is echoed by the countless disparities that continue to persist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada, including:

- Life Expectancy (2016): First Nations people living on reserves had a life expectancy gap of up to 9 years compared to non-Indigenous people. Inuit populations experienced life expectancy differences of over 10 years in some cases. Métis and off-reserve First Nations populations had smaller gaps, typically around 4 to 7 years.<sup>252</sup>
- Median Individual Income (2020): Indigenous individuals aged 25–64 had a median income of \$36,000, compared to \$47,000 for non-Indigenous individuals—a gap of \$11,000 annually.<sup>253</sup>
- Employment Rate (2021): The employment rate for Indigenous people aged 25–64 was 63.2%, while it was 76.9% for non-Indigenous individuals, a gap of 13.7 percentage points.<sup>254</sup>
- High School Completion (2021): Among individuals aged 25–64, 80.3% of Indigenous people had at least a high school diploma, compared to 92.1% of non-Indigenous people.<sup>255</sup>
- University Degree (2021): Only 12.4% of Indigenous individuals aged 25–64 had a university degree, whereas 32.4% of non-Indigenous individuals had one.<sup>256</sup>
- Crowded Housing (2021): 17.1% of Indigenous People (21.4% of First Nations, 7.9% of Métis, and 40.1% of Inuit) lived in overcrowded housing considered unsuitable for the number of occupants.<sup>257</sup>
- Dwellings in Need of Major Repairs (2021): 17.1% of Indigenous households (24.2% First Nations, 51.7% Inuit in Inuit Nunangat, 8.6% Métis) lived in homes requiring major repairs, while this was true for only 6.0% of non-Indigenous households.<sup>258</sup>
- Children in Foster Care (2021): Indigenous children accounted for 53.8% of all children in foster care, despite representing only 7.7% of the child population.<sup>259</sup>
- Incarceration Rates (2020–2021): Indigenous adults represented 32% of the federal incarcerated population while comprising about 5% of the adult population in Canada.<sup>260</sup>
- Suicide (2016): Suicide rates were three times higher for First Nations people (24.3 per 100,000), nine times higher for Inuit (72.3 per 100,000), and twice as high for Métis compared to the suicide rate among non-Indigenous Canadians (8 per 100,000).<sup>261</sup>

It must be acknowledged that some improvements have been made to close disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada in recent years. These include:

- Median Individual Income (2020): From 2015 to 2020, a large narrowing of the gap was observed for each Indigenous group, with increases in median individual income ranging from \$4,500 to \$9,900 since 2015.<sup>262</sup>
- Employment Rate (2021): Since 2016, there have been slight improvements in the gaps in employment rate relative to the non-Indigenous population for Registered Indians living on reserve, Non-Status

Indians and Métis.<sup>263</sup>

- High School Completion (2021): 80,280 more Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 had a high school education in 2021 than in 2016 (925 Registered Indians living on reserve, 26,150 Registered Indians living off reserve, 25,545 Non-Status Indians, 1,730 Inuit and 25,930 Métis).<sup>264</sup>
- University Degree (2021): From 2016 to 2021, an additional 47,980 Indigenous people (4,985 Registered Indians living on reserve, 14,630 Registered Indians living off reserve, 9,200 Non-Status Indians, 890 Inuit and 18,275 Métis) obtained a university education. However, gaps in university completion relative to the non-Indigenous population widened for all Indigenous groups.<sup>265</sup>
- Housing (2021): The gaps in both the proportion of dwellings that were crowded and the proportion of dwellings in need of major repair generally narrowed. However, the narrowing of the gap in the proportion of crowded dwellings was due in part to increases in crowded dwellings among the non-Indigenous population.<sup>266</sup>

Despite these gains, significant gaps remain. Until they are closed, reconciliation and decolonization efforts must continue with renewed urgency and resolve.

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

The decade from 2015 to 2024 marked a significant shift in Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. It brought the completion of the TRC and MMIWG Inquiries, ratification of UNDRIP, legislative reforms, and the establishment of a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Still, there remains much work to do to truly achieve reconciliation and even more to decolonize. Addressing the historic injustices and the ongoing inequalities faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada requires taking further steps toward justice, healing, and upholding Indigenous rights, including:

- Fully implement the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)<sup>267</sup>
- Invest significantly in Indigenous-led and culturally safe education, health care, and justice systems to address long-standing gaps and promote holistic well-being<sup>268</sup>
- Ensure free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) is meaningfully obtained before any development or project affecting Indigenous lands and territories<sup>269</sup>
- Support Indigenous self-determination and governance by advancing legal and policy reforms—including the repeal and replacement of the Indian Act—that respect Indigenous laws, leadership, and nationhood<sup>270</sup>
- Provide long-term, equitable funding for housing, clean drinking water, and essential infrastructure in Indigenous communities<sup>271</sup>
- Sustainably fund the revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures to ensure their survival and growth for future generations<sup>272</sup>
- End harmful and costly litigation practices, including challenges against the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decisions and the use of punitive mechanisms like the Critical Response Unit, which undermine Indigenous rights and justice.<sup>273 274</sup>

Decolonization and reconciliation are what create a future in which Indigenous peoples can thrive in accordance with their self-determined laws, cultures, spiritualities, worldviews, and relationships to the lands and waters we share. As Governor General Mary Simon, Canada's first Indigenous Governor General, emphasized: "As difficult and long as this road to reconciliation can be, it is having a positive impact—and we cannot give up."<sup>275</sup> The last decade exposed the truth. The next must deliver transformation.<sup>276</sup>

## BLACK COMMUNITIES AND ANTI-BLACK RACISM

### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

The federal government has not developed legislation or policy that directly addresses the experiences of women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ communities of African descent as they relate to advancing gender justice. Instead, there have been federal actions to address anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination across various federal departments, including new institutional mechanisms, funding opportunities, and data collection processes.

One key institutional mechanism is the [Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat \(ARSEC\)](#), housed at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), which aims to transform "the lives of people facing racism in their daily lives."<sup>277</sup> The Secretariat builds upon work that began in 2018 through the [Building a Foundation for Change: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019–2022](#), which saw a \$45 million investment led by the then Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism.<sup>278</sup> ARSEC now supports over 70 federal initiatives with a \$100 million budget, including the [Black-Led Philanthropic Endowment Fund](#) and the [Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative](#).<sup>279</sup> [Changing Systems, Transforming Lives: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy](#) is the federal government strategy aimed at exploring anti-racism legislative options, investing in communities, improving frameworks, accountability, and institutional capacity-building.

In 2021, the federal government announced a \$2.5 million fund to "advance gender equity and prevent gender-based violence (GBV) against Black women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond".<sup>280</sup> Other federal actions include the [Black Justice Strategy](#), endorsing the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent in 2015 and the [Second Decade in 2024](#), [The Mental Health of Black Canadians Fund](#), the [Black Entrepreneurship Program](#), and [Community Support for Black Canadian Youth Initiative](#).

### ANALYSIS

In the 2017 Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on its mission to Canada, the group found that Canada "has not introduced special measures for African Canadians, despite the disparities and systemic anti-Black racism and discrimination they face."<sup>281</sup> Though there have been a variety of new institutional mechanisms since the report was published, there are still persistent gaps in addressing the impacts that anti-Black racism has on women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ communities. We know that Black 2SLGBTQI+ populations experience "higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and police discrimination compared to the general population."<sup>282</sup>

The Foundation for Black Communities has noted a lack of public policy responses such as the frayed and fragile safety net accessible by Black communities - evident during the COVID-19 pandemic - lack of capital

and financing infrastructure for Black communities, and the need for dedicated long-term funding to address the gaps.

Black women and girls also face a disproportionate rate of violence, however few to no policies address the experiences that Black women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ communities face. In addition, Black women who've survived violence confront cultural, societal, and familial cues that silence them from speaking up. Those who do try to access social services face barriers to accessing support that reflects and addresses their lived experiences.

Black and Indigenous women represent almost 50% of inmates in federal correctional institutions for women despite representing only 3% and 4.3% of the population of women in Canada, respectively. The federal government has launched a 10-year Black Justice Strategy to address the overrepresentation of Black people in the criminal justice system, including their experiences with police, as victims and survivors, and in incarceration.

A form of invisibility exists in federal actions for Black and racialized women, girls, and gender-diverse people. Experiences are “largely homogenized...as all racialized women are classified as visible minorities.”<sup>283</sup> One example is the gap in disaggregated data on experiences of Black and racialized communities. The Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS) 2018 report is the most comprehensive survey of IPV with disaggregated data, however, even in this report, the data was not fully disaggregated.<sup>284</sup> The lack of data “renders Black women invisible and makes it difficult to assess their unique experiences of IPV and its consequences in their lives.”<sup>285</sup> According to the survey, 42% of Black women “were more likely to have experienced IPV since the age of 15.”<sup>286</sup>

The federal government has acknowledged this data gap, not only for Black communities but for other communities across Canada. The [Gender Diversity and Inclusion Statistics \(GDIS\)](#) Hub aims to address this gap by developing disaggregated and intersectional data, analytical products and insights.”<sup>287</sup> GDIS was created in 2019, and is now publishing data, after decades of inconsistent or non-existent long term data on experiences. GDIS has been an improvement in federal collection of disaggregated data but still continues to use catch-all terms that do not address the social disparities and experiences of different racialized communities. Limited data has enormous implications on policy development and has been an institutional barrier for Black communities across federal departments for decades.

Black communities in Canada continue to face discrimination in many workplaces. Black, racialized, immigrant, undocumented and newcomer women represent a significant portion of care economy workers but face systemic discrimination in accessing decent work. From care homes to the federal government, as noted in the [Black Class Action](#) lawsuit, Black workers face systemic racism and discrimination. The Employment Equity Act Review Task Force recommended the creation of “a separate employment equity group representing Black workers” due to the “distinct history of slavery and segregation in Canada, and the statistical data showing persisting differential treatment and underrepresentation.”<sup>288</sup>

Immigration legislation and policies continue to disproportionately impact Black migrant women, however little to no analysis at the federal level has been taken to address the ways which these programs place Black women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people into long term precarity. Migrant women, in predominantly care positions, enter Canada through temporary immigration pilot programs that continue to replicate discriminatory processes and practices compounding systemic discriminatory effects across health, education, employment and safety.



## SUSTAINING PROGRESS ON GENDER EQUALITY

The past decade saw a shift in federal government engagement with Black communities including increased and dedicated funding initiatives, and the development of committees within and across federal agencies. However, these initiatives only begin to address the impacts of colonial and systemic racism against Black communities and in many cases lack a strong intersectional analysis of experiences of Black women, and 2SLGBTQI+ communities.

What's needed is long-term policy development and funding towards programs that ensure Black communities can continue to address barriers and anti-Black racism across Canada. More needs to be done to address the high levels of violence that Black trans people, women, and girls experience, including violence from institutions such as the police. This includes addressing how a lack of an intersectional approach to policies, policymaking and implementation continues to cause systemic harm.

As noted earlier, implementation of the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force recommendations is key to addressing systemic issues that impact women and gender-diverse people. Better outcomes for women's economic security requires going beyond market-based solutions and integrating an intersectional gender justice lens.

The federal government must continue to address anti-Black racism, and explore how Black women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ communities have been and continue to be impacted by the lack of an intersectional anti-racist approach to policies and legislation.

Federal funds to Black communities must continue to ensure that Black communities can develop and fund organizations and programs that address anti-Black racism. The federal government should ensure that funding and institutional support are long-term.

## ACCESS AND INCLUSION

### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Over the last decade, the federal government has developed legislative and policy actions addressing barriers for people living with disabilities. This includes federal recognition of the lack of data on and understanding of the needs of people living with disabilities in employment, human rights, housing, and safety.

In 2017, The Honourable Carla Qualtrough became the first Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities.<sup>289</sup> The [Accessible Canada Act](#), passed in 2019, works toward a barrier-free Canada by 2040.<sup>290</sup> In the same year, the federal government also signed the [Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), which allows complaints to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities if their rights are violated under the convention.<sup>291</sup>

In 2021, the federal budget promised just under \$12 million for developing a disability benefit within three years based on recommendations and consultations with the community. This work led to the tabling of the first draft of [Bill-C22](#), the Canada Disability Benefit Act. The stated aim of Bill C-22, passed in 2023, is to “reduce poverty and to support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit.”<sup>292</sup>

The federal government also developed the [Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#), which embedded “disability considerations across our programs while identifying targeted investments in key areas to drive change”<sup>293</sup>

## ANALYSIS

Advocates had been calling for \$1000/month support from the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) “to lift women and gender-diverse people experiencing disability out of housing insecurity or homelessness” as a large number of those who are unhoused are living with disabilities.<sup>294</sup> Despite the language of the Canada Disability Benefit Act, the CDB only offers “working-age persons with disabilities up to \$200 per month in financial support,”<sup>295</sup> insufficient to materially improve living conditions. This income-tested benefit also requires prior approval for the Disability Tax Credit.<sup>296</sup>

The Canada Disability Benefit raised serious concerns when it was announced. In addition to the low level of payments, the definition of disability used for the Disability Tax Credit is narrow and registration will require multiple steps of qualifying for the disability tax-credit certificate, filing a tax return and then applying for the benefit through Service Canada.<sup>297</sup> There are also concerns about clawback of provincial benefits, which led to significant confusion about the benefit.<sup>298</sup> To address poverty, the federal government needs to go beyond tax implications and address the systemic root causes of poverty for women living with disabilities.

Women, girls and gender-diverse people living with disabilities continue to be invisibilized by federal actions. In Canada, 30% of women live with disabilities, and Indigenous, Black, and racialized women experience higher rates of disability.<sup>299</sup> What this means is that a significant population of Canada faces multiple barriers in all aspects of life. However, there has been minimal action to address those. An examination of all the human rights complaints made at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels, showed 50% of cases are disability-related.<sup>300</sup>

Almost 55% of women living with a disability have experienced intimate partner violence, 18% percentage points higher than those without a disability.<sup>301</sup> They are twice “as likely as women without disabilities to report experiencing emotional, financial, physical or sexual violence or abuse committed by a current or former partner.”<sup>302</sup> Survivors of violence also are more likely to experience violence within their homes compared to those without a disability.<sup>303</sup> This experience is compounded by racism and systemic discrimination for Black, Indigenous, and racialized peoples. Heightened experiences of violence also impact accessing support services that reflect lived experience and needs.<sup>304</sup> This has led to people living with disabilities leaving unsafe homes and becoming homeless.

Access to safe, culturally aware, equitable healthcare is a barrier for many Black, Indigenous, and racialized women and gender-diverse peoples living with disabilities. Black women face racial and systemic discrimination in accessing health care that addresses their needs, and these harms are intensified if they have a disability.<sup>305</sup>

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) as a result of being hit on the head is a common issue for incarcerated women in Canada and highly prevalent in women who have experienced violence. In a Toronto study, nine of 10 sex workers had experienced TBI in their lifetime.<sup>306</sup> Indigenous and Black women and gender-diverse people are heavily overrepresented among incarcerated women.<sup>307</sup>

Though there have been policy actions to address homelessness for communities in the most need, federal actions have continued to fail to include women and gender-diverse peoples with disabilities in accessing housing that is safe, maintains their agency, and is affordable. This is a gap not addressed by the National Housing Strategy. Addressing the barriers to accessible and equitable housing would also address the higher instances of poverty that women with disabilities experience. Women living with disabilities “are more likely to

spend over 50% of their before-tax income on housing than men with disabilities.”<sup>308</sup>

The federal government has taken some strides to create a more equitable and barrier-free society but continues to fall short in addressing systemic issues.

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

The Canada Disability Benefit needs to be maintained, and the monthly payment increased. Implementing it as a refundable tax benefit would remove some barriers to access and reduce delivery costs.

Expansion of Medical Assistance in Dying needs to be halted until risks for, and unmet needs of, women and gender-diverse people with disabilities are met. Expanding the new national Pharmacare program and addressing housing access for women and gender-diverse people living with disabilities are also key.

The cabinet position focused on developing solutions and programs for people living with disabilities offered much-needed leadership on the issue. It disappeared after the 2019 election and is not included in the current cabinet.

## SEX WORKER RIGHTS

### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Since 2014, the federal government has not developed any legislation or federal actions toward the protection of women and gender-diverse sex workers. The previous federal government introduced the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA), which passed in 2014, and amended the Criminal Code to effectively criminalize sex work. This is the first time that the purchase of sexual services has been criminalized. PCEPA passed shortly after the historic Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford court case which ruled that Canada’s sex work laws violated the Charter rights of sex workers.<sup>309</sup>

### ANALYSIS

Since 2014, sex worker rights groups from across Canada have been working toward ensuring a better understanding of the experiences of sex workers, including the ways in which criminalization has and continues to create dangerous environments for sex workers. PCEPA criminalized the purchasing of sex work for the first time in Canada which advocates have described as ushering an era of misinformation, isolation, increased targeted violence, lowered safety mechanisms, violence against im/migrant sex workers and increased stigma and discrimination against sex workers.<sup>310</sup> While sex workers represent a diverse set of workers, women, trans, and non-binary racialized peoples are overrepresented.

Since the enactment of PCEPA there have been a few legal and policy challenges against the law.<sup>311</sup> The federal funding and legal environment has been primarily addressed under the lens of PCEPA, which does not “distinguish between sex work, labour exploitation, and violence.”<sup>312</sup> This is an important aspect, as funding and programming post-PCEPA has primarily been distributed to anti-trafficking and sexual exploitation programming and policing initiatives.

Increased targeted violence against sex workers has been noted as one of the impacts of PCEPA and federal programming. Research has shown that sex workers are less likely to report injuries since the introduction of PCPEA.<sup>313</sup> As noted by the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, the criminalization of sex work “comes with constant police presence, social, and racial profiling, harassment, surveillance, arrest, detention and deportation.”<sup>314</sup>

Over the last decade sex workers, sex worker rights organizations, and researchers have worked to uphold the decision by the Supreme Court of Canada. Prior to winning election the federal government outlined that they would address PCEPA,<sup>315</sup> but this has not happened. Recently, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights reviewed the impact of the PCEPA on its outlined mission of protecting communities. The report listed various recommendations but did acknowledge that PCEPA “causes serious harm to those engaged in sex work by making the work more dangerous.”<sup>316</sup>

In addition to the work being done to decriminalize sex work, work is being done to address prohibitive immigration laws. Under current immigration laws, in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, engaging in sex work could lead to deportation. This places more stringent conditions for racialized migrant workers.

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS ON GENDER EQUALITY

Sex workers in Canada continue to live in precarious environments under the current legislative regime. Since the Supreme Court of Canada stated that current legislation in Canada violated the human rights of sex workers, federal actions have continued to negatively impact sex worker rights. Sustaining progress requires respecting the equality rights of sex workers.

## 2SLGBTQI+ RIGHTS

### ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

In the past decade, a number of actions have been taken to support 2SLGBTQI+ communities across departments and laws, including a formal apology from the Prime Minister in 2017.

In 2016, the federal government announced the creation of the Special Advisor on LGBTQ2 issues and the 2SLGBTQI+ Secretariat (as it is now called) to “work across federal public service to support the integration of 2SLGBTQI+ considerations into the everyday work of the Government of Canada.”<sup>317</sup> Shortly after, the Canadian Human Rights Act was modified to add gender expression and identity through Bill C-16, [An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code](#) in 2017. In addition, in 2018, the [Expungement of Historically Unjust Convictions Act](#) began the process of destroying the records of “unjustly convicted and imposed criminal records on individuals for engaging in consensual activity.”<sup>318</sup> In 2019, Bill C-4, [An Act to amend the Criminal Code \(conversion therapy\)](#), criminalized “the acts of providing, advertising, and profiting from conversion therapy practices.”<sup>319</sup> That same year, passports, travel documents, citizenship certificates, and permanent residence cards could add an X as a gender identity.<sup>320</sup>

The period between 2020 and 2024, included various other positive actions including the [Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan](#) introduced in 2022, which commits \$100 million over 5 years to address six distinct priority areas:

- Prioritize and sustain 2SLGBTQI+ community action
- Continue to advance and strengthen 2SLGBTQI+ rights at home and abroad
- Support Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ resilience and resurgence
- Engage everyone in Canada in fostering a 2SLGBTQI+ inclusive future
- Strengthen 2SLGBTQI+ data and evidence-based policy making
- Embed 2SLGBTQI+ issues in the work of the Government of Canada.

In addition to the Action Plan, the 2SLGBTQI+ Two-Spirit Senior Advisor was appointed to “work with partners throughout the federal government and with Indigenous 2SLGBTQI+ communities, organizations and representatives.”<sup>321</sup> Also, in 2023, the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development announced the “world’s first-ever 2SLGBTQI+ Entrepreneurship Program.”<sup>322</sup> The [2SLGBTQI+ Entrepreneurship Program](#) aims to “build a more inclusive economy for the over 100,000 2SLGBTQI+-owned and -operated businesses in Canada.”<sup>323</sup> There have also been many different funding programs across various federal agencies including the [2SLGBTQI+ Community Capacity Fund](#), and the [2SLGBTQI+ Projects Fund](#).

## ANALYSIS

This past decade saw many firsts, including appointing Special Advisors, a Secretariat, the federal action plan, capacity and project funding, and the development of data collection hubs. The shift came with funding and more awareness of the experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ communities past and present in Canada across Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities. This is an overall shift from the previous decade, where little to no action was taken to proactively address systemic discrimination.

According to government data, since 2016, the federal government has invested \$250 million in this work.<sup>324</sup> However, these shifts, though significant, have not had equal impact across many communities in Canada. 2SLGBTQI+ communities still face significant and life-threatening discrimination, violence, exclusion and insecurity.

Trans communities face higher levels of discrimination and violence. Though there have been significant shifts federally, there has been consistent push back from some provincial lawmakers, as evidenced by transphobic laws adopted in Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Alberta in the past few years. Trans and non-binary youth face disproportionate rates of violence, with two in five considering suicide due to the experiences of physical, sexual and verbal harassment.<sup>325</sup> Non-binary and trans people face higher barriers in accessing and maintaining housing, more often lose housing because of their identities, and anticipate discrimination when looking for housing.<sup>326</sup>

For Black 2SLGBTQI+ communities, 86% have experienced anti-Black racism, 70% have faced hate crimes due to their racial identity, and 54% do not have access to maintain stable housing due to systemic discrimination based on their identities.<sup>327</sup> The gap in service delivery and access for Black 2SLGBTQI+ communities is “exacerbated by subtle racism, financial discrimination, and a limited understanding of the intersectionality of race, sexuality, and gender identity.”<sup>328</sup>

The Action Plan represents a start, but as The Enchanté Network notes, it “lacks a plan for implementation or any notable timelines.”<sup>329</sup> Others note the lack of permanent funding plans for national and international interventions.<sup>330</sup> Implementation and sustainability of funding are key weaknesses of the Action Plan, and it does not address long-standing calls from the sector for long-term sustained funding to address systemic

issues. The Plan aims to provide capacity and project funding and direct 75% of all available funds to community organizations. This is essential, as this decade saw the “substantial increase in new organizations, significant growth in existing community centres, and a diversification of communities and areas of focus.”

<sup>331</sup> Significant actions have been taken over the last decade to address the experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ communities, but the legislation and policy actions have not gone far enough.

## SUSTAINING PROGRESS

Significant progress has been made to build a safer and more equitable future for 2SLGBTQI+ people by the variety of federal actions taken, but there is much more to be done. This decade aimed to dismantle, build, and develop new federal processes to address institutional discriminations and barriers and has resulted in the Federal Action Plan. All of this must be sustained and the work must continue, and go beyond, with holistic long-term actions, and permanent funding.

## MIGRANT WORKER RIGHTS

Federal actions relating to the rights and experiences of migrant care workers have been discussed in the sections on care work and childcare. This section focuses on immigration and policy actions and inactions of the federal government, primarily on policies impacting women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

## ACTIONS ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

Since 2014, various federal actions have significantly impacted migrant workers. However, many of the programs have been running for decades. The 2014 [Permanent Residence Pilot and the Caregiver Program](#) was relaunched in 2019 as the [Home Support Worker Pilot](#) which was recently relaunched as the 2025 [Home Child Care Provider Pilot and Home Support Worker Pilot](#).

## ANALYSIS

Over the last decade, Canada has received many migrant workers, including international students, permanent residents, and temporary workers, who have contributed to the labour market, and care and agricultural economies. The migrant community is diverse, representing communities from all around the world. Migrant workers in rural communities face many compounding factors, including structural precarity, lack of labour protections, unequal power dynamics in employer-tied housing, social isolation and patriarchal gender roles.<sup>332</sup> Higher numbers of personal support workers (PSWs) are Filipina and Black women.<sup>333</sup>

Programs, like the [Home Childcare Provider or Home Support Worker](#), launched in 2019, aimed to “provide a more structured pathway to permanent residence”<sup>334</sup> but fell short of promises and have led to increased precarity and labour exploitation. For instance, the ‘live-in requirement’ for care workers was removed, but in reality, given the costs of housing and living, care workers continued to live with their employers.<sup>335</sup> Research also shows that PSWs are the lowest-paid in the sector.<sup>336</sup> In 2019, the federal government promised to approve 5,500 workers per year for permanent residency, but only approved 5,700 over five years.<sup>337</sup> To address the care deficit, the federal government has relied heavily on migrant and gendered labour. However, it continues to shift towards “promoting temporary migration rather than permanent migration” to address the care deficit.<sup>338</sup>



During the pandemic, many migrant workers faced significant challenges, including access to healthcare, mental health and financial strain, and systemic discrimination and racism. Home care workers were forced to adhere to their employer's demands, including being isolated in their homes without the ability to leave.<sup>339</sup> Workers also had little to no access to support systems like CERB or other financial support systems in case of job loss and, therefore, were highly dependent on their employers. One in three workers lost their jobs, and for some, that almost meant a loss in their housing and other social supports.<sup>340</sup>

Federal actions impacting migrant workers have significant implications on communities due to the gendered policy lens when they are developed. The programs are open to all migrants; however, care programs approve the majority of visas for women-identifying people, while the agriculture programs approve the majority of visas for male-identifying people.

## ACHIEVING PROGRESS

To achieve progress for migrant workers would require permanent residence status for all, with pathways to regularization that are clear, easily accessible, straightforward and without risk of deportation. Status for all should include all migrant workers, including queer and trans people. Family reunification should be prioritized under the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) and frameworks guiding who constitutes a family should account for broader conceptualizations of family.

The threat of detention as a result of immigration status prevents workers with precarious status from accessing services and seeking support in exploitative situations. Centers that criminalize and detain people based on immigration status should be abolished.

Unconditional open work permits should replace closed work permits and all TFWPs should eliminate employer-tied work permits, allowing workers the opportunity to change jobs.<sup>341</sup>

### 3. SUSTAINING PROGRESS ON GENDER EQUALITY: WHAT'S AT STAKE

To state the obvious, from this review it is more than fair to draw the conclusion that progress on gender equality and attention to intersectional impacts and systemic discrimination accelerated over the nearly 10 years since election of a federal government that “highlighted gender equality as core to its mandate and vision for the country.”<sup>342</sup> At a time when the country is “all hands on deck” to weather economic tariff storms, an expanded number of women and gender-diverse people in the work force is a strength, and especially so given the high education levels of women in Canada. For many women, it is access to child care that makes work possible. A telling point in the review was the revelation that the \$10-a-day child care program likely prevented a technical recession in the fall of 2023.

By design, the report covers a lot of ground, choosing breadth over depth to scan initiatives – legislation, policies and programs – on a broad range of issues positioned to advance gender equality since 2015. It offers the ability to see cross-cutting connections. For example, did initiating gender parity in cabinet in 2015 lead, down the road, to a woman holding the role of Minister of Finance at the moment when a global emergency sparked a social consensus sufficient to build a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care program?

#### WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR A YOUNG FAMILY?

Tuula is a thirty-something cis-woman working remotely in the non-profit sector, a woman-majority sector with modest wage scales and benefits. Married with one child aged two, her husband is a public sector worker in law enforcement security work. They live in rental housing in the Niagara Region of Ontario, the largest industrialized area in Canada, having moved twice for her husband's work.

When their son was born, both parents took time off, taking advantage of 2019 changes to parental benefits. Tuula took the full 52 weeks of maternal and parental benefits, her husband took the “use it or lose it” for a non-birthing parent.

They've been receiving the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) since their son was born, originally at \$120 a month, then increased to \$150 a month as CCB was indexed. When they experienced a temporary drop in family income due to a job switch, CCB increased the following year to \$330 a month.

Their son goes to full time child care in a centre that's part of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care program. They currently pay fees of \$460 a month; without the program they would be paying \$1000 a month. Tuula anticipates the fee will drop to \$10 a day in 2026. When their son was 18 months old, the federal government's elimination of accumulation of interest on all Canada Student Loans took effect, helping both Tuula and husband to pay off their student loans. Altogether, through these programs, they are now saving \$600-\$700/month.

A number of shortlists could be compiled of key initiatives discussed that have strengthened Canada by strengthening intersectional gender equality. The list below focuses on transformative initiatives already underway that now hang in the balance of a future government's commitment to gender equality, with consideration given to current and future impact of the initiative, future committed investment, importance of work still to happen and long-term social return on investment:

1. Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care
2. Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care
3. Canada Child Benefit
4. GBA+ across whole of government
5. Expansion of Women and Gender Equality Canada
6. Renewing and expanding the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence
7. 2SMMIWG Calls to Justice
8. National Pharmacare
9. Care economy and Migrant Women Workers
10. Increased and broadened Canada Disability Benefit

All of this requires skilled, committed, and connected leadership, in the form of a **dedicated gender equality seat at the cabinet table.**

What's at stake? Over the last 10 years, a transformative project advancing gender equality and reducing systemic discrimination has taken root on Parliament Hill. As recently as early March 2025, provinces and territories were still stepping up to sign agreements to join Pharmacare and extend Early Learning and Child Care into the next decade. A retreat from these investments will not strengthen the economy or the country. Choosing to continue the momentum for change and sustain progress on intersectional gender equality will allow Canada to reap benefits – social, economic and human – for decades to come.

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We gratefully acknowledge the labour and contributions of all involved in the creation of this document.

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